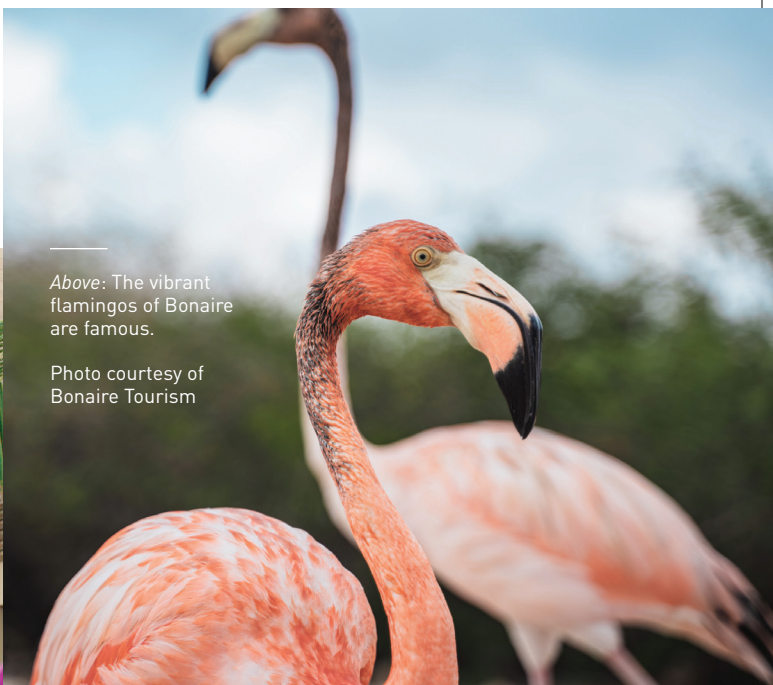


Far Corners of the Caribbean

BY CAROLYN O'NEIL

ISLAND LIFE FROM NORTH TO SOUTH

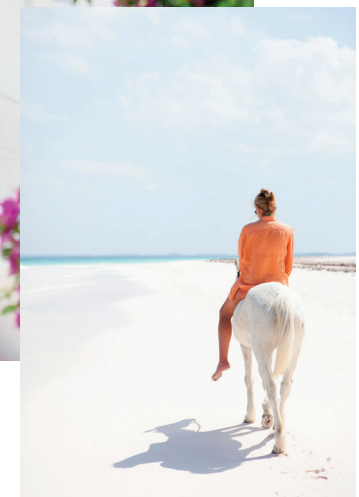


Above: The vibrant flamingos of Bonaire are famous.

Photo courtesy of Bonaire Tourism

Left, below, and opposite: Experience a dreamy getaway in the Turks & Caicos with Wymara.

Photos courtesy of Wymara Resorts & Villas



natural ecology both under the sea and on the land. That means lose the plastic water bottles, choose a reef-friendly biodegradable sunscreen, and please don't feed the flamingos. Since the water surrounding Bonaire is a protected National Marine Park, expect to pay a required Nature Tag fee as a contribution to the eco-conscious mission. So while tourism is encouraged, this island paradise is serious about preserving the beauty of Bonaire for today *and* tomorrow.

IT'S IN OUR NATURE

One of the most beautiful sights on Bonaire is a flamboyance (a flock) of pink flamingos. Their diet of algae and tiny brine shrimp brings on the pink, and that's why you'll see fifty shades from pale to brilliant as a flamingo matures. Bonaire is home to over two hundred species of birds, including the Caribbean parakeet and the endangered yellow-shouldered parrot.

Sometimes protecting nature means eradicating a destructive species. Enter the lionfish, originally from the Pacific Ocean but now on the hit list for destroying Caribbean marine life. Happily, lionfish are delicious to eat, but it does take a pro to clean this pesky invader because of its venomous spines! Doing all of the work and earning all of the smiles is the Cactus Blue Food Truck, famous for serving up lionfish burgers with a spicy sauce and fresh lemonade.

T

he Caribbean Sea is dotted with island jewels varying in geography from white sand beaches to tropical jungles, mountainous terrain to coral reefs. Each offers a diverse mix of ethnicities, languages, cultures, and cuisine. Let's visit two sparkling examples in the far corners of the Caribbean—Bonaire in the south and the Turks and Caicos in the north. The appeal of swaying palms and lapping waves is a common theme, yet the destination details are distinctively different.

BONAIRE: A BLUE DESTINATION

Designated as the first Blue Destination in the world, Bonaire is fiercely proud and protective of its waters, wildlife, and cultural ways. All visitors are encouraged to sign the Bonaire Bond, pledging to understand and respect the island's



Left: A dreamy Bonaire sunset

Photo by Elliott Howell, courtesy of Bonaire Tourism

Below: Enjoy upscale Caribbean cuisine by Chef Andrew Miroshch at Wymara in the Turks & Caicos.

Photos courtesy of Wymara Resorts & Villas



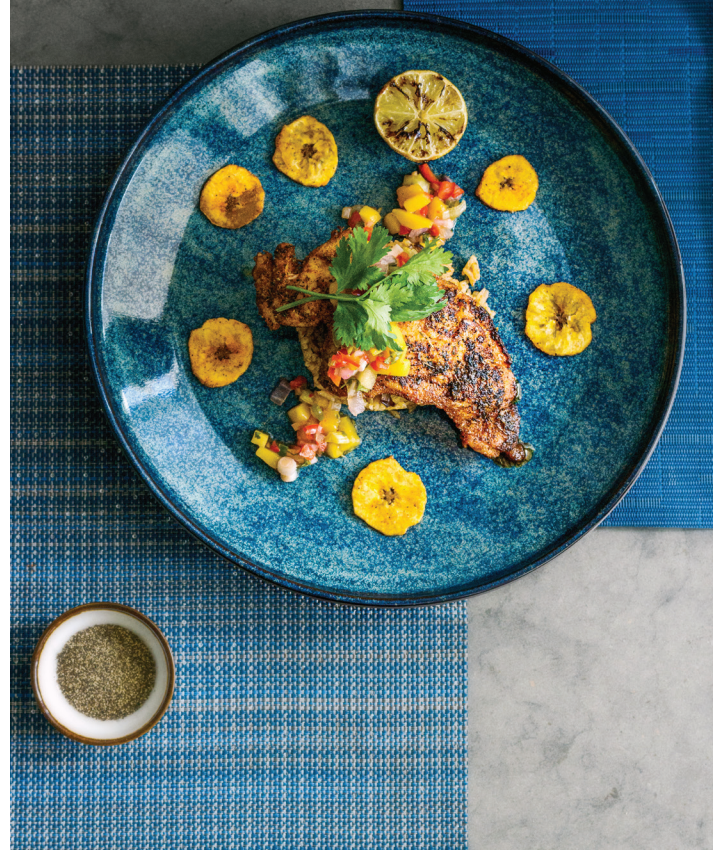
To the north, experience a magical tour of towering boulders, cactus fields, wandering donkeys, and tiny villages.

treasure at the Cadushy Distillery, known for cactus liqueurs and an award-winning rum. Step into history at the Mangazina di Rei Exhibition to learn how thorny cactus fences are carefully constructed and why iguana—an island food source—is still referred to as “Bonaire Chicken.”

LET’S GO DUTCH

Located just fifty miles off the coast of South America, Bonaire is part of the Dutch Caribbean’s “ABC islands” along with Aruba and Curaçao. So get ready to hear a lot of Dutch being spoken and meet vacationers from the Netherlands. Grocery stores are well stocked with Dutch treats such as Gouda cheeses, Heineken, and traditional stropwafel cookies.

The Dutch influence on Bonaire is delightfully expressed in the restaurant scene, where many chefs are professionally trained in the Netherlands but celebrate preparing local fish, such as snook and wahoo, with island produce and spices. The Bamboo Bonaire Boutique Resort’s onsite restaurant, CHEFS, offers an exceptional dining experience with one seating a night for up to sixteen guests who watch the chefs cook, assemble, and serve a carnival of exciting courses. Friends since culinary school, chef-owners Han ten Winkel and Mark Tromp take turns describing the exquisite dishes (in Dutch and English) such as Caribbean snook filet with a chicharrón crumble, sweet corn beurre blanc, and lobster oil. Then how about guinea fowl with black truffle sauce and malanga chips? The evening concludes with more drinks while guests and chefs chat about the evening’s menu and other adventures on Bonaire.



BONAIRE BEACHES AND BEYOND

While scuba diving is a major magnet for water sports lovers, Bonaire is also great for snorkeling, paddleboarding, windsurfing, and a kayak ecotour through the mangroves. Hop out of your kayak and snorkel around to spot barracuda and other fish nibbling on mangrove roots.

Or perhaps you might prefer the ease of slipping into the clear blue waters of a palm-lined beach like the one at the peaceful Harbour Village resort. Just steps from your lounge chair, you can dip below the waves to swim with an aquarium of colorful tropical fish and then raise your hand to signal the bartender for another rum punch.

Craving more water with a side of food and wine? Melisa Sailing elevates a sunset cruise with an onboard chef’s tasting menu, including citrus-marinated tuna, beef tenderloin with white chocolate garlic sauce, and rum baba with banana compote and coconut ice cream.

Traveling inland, another world awaits. To the south, witness an expanse of pink salt flats, where the briny stuff is harvested from evaporated seawater. To the north, experience a magical tour of towering boulders, cactus fields, wandering donkeys, and tiny villages. In Rincon, founded as a pirate hideout, you’ll find



Top: Freedive with thousands of colorful fish and other marine life in beautiful Bonaire.

Photo courtesy of Bonaire Tourism

Above: A kayak or paddleboard tour through the mangroves is a great way to see the islands.

Photo courtesy of The Looking Glass Watersports and Adventures, Turks & Caicos

Right: Experience another side of Bonaire with a Jeep tour through Washington Park.

Photo courtesy of Bonaire Tourism





This is where you'll find gorgeous Grace Bay Beach and many fine hotels, including the elegant Wymara Resort and Villas.

Venturing further, private boat charters take snorkelers to prime locations to swim with rainbows of tropical fish on the coral reefs and to tiny outer islands to join lazy iguanas sunning on the beach.

A BRITISH ISLAND

The Turks and Caicos Islands are an easy flight from the US and are located near the Bahamas. But prepare to drive as they do in the United Kingdom—on the left side of the road—because you're now in a British Overseas Territory. The airport is in Providenciales, nicknamed "Provo." This is where you'll find gorgeous Grace Bay Beach and many fine hotels, including the elegant Wymara Resort and Villas. Wymara's dedication to sustainable hospitality while maintaining a luxury-level experience is commendable. Whether you're reclining poolside at a spacious private villa overlooking the sea or socializing at the hotel's Pink Bar beachside, you'll find organic skin-care products in the spa, landscapes irrigated with recovered water, and alternatives to single-use plastics.

CARIBBEAN CUISINE

The hotel's restaurant, Indigo, sets the scene each evening with a casually chic crowd enjoying Caribbean conch chowder, freshly caught grouper, and mahi-mahi. The star of the dinner show is the expertise of Wymara's culinary director, Chef Andrew Mirosch, who hails from Queensland, Australia, and is a licensed fisherman. This is the place to discover the deliciousness of seasonal large lobster tails from local waters grilled perfectly on "the barbie" or poached in butter and rum with lime, garlic, and chili.

Vegetarian and vegan dishes get the chef's special attention, too, with creations such as compressed watermelon carpaccio with pickled beets and grilled cauliflower steak with toasted almonds and chimichurri. On Saturdays, there's a beachfront Texas BBQ dinner with twenty-four-hour smoked brisket and all the trimmings, including live music and moonlight under the palms. ▣

To start planning your visit to some of the Caribbean's lesser-known islands, head to BonaireIsland.com and TurksandCaicosTourism.com. For accommodations, be sure to check out HarbourVillage.com and WymaraResortandVillas.com.

Carolyn O'Neil is an award-winning Atlanta-based food writer who specializes in culinary travel and healthy lifestyles. She believes that travel is the ultimate way to learn about the people of the world and that cuisine is the most exciting way to learn about their histories and cultures. Visit her blog at TheHappyHealthyKitchen.com.

**TURKS & CAICOS:
ALL OF THE BLUES**

It's as if the entire spectrum of blues in the crayon box sparkles to life in the waters surrounding the Turks and Caicos Islands. As sunlight bounces off the white sand below, the color blue illuminates the sea in striking shades of turquoise, teal, and aqua. Consistently awarded as having the best beaches in the world, the sand here is sugar white, soft, smooth, and cool under your toes.

Part of the Lucayan Archipelago, the Turks and Caicos Islands are perched on the northeastern edge of the Caribbean region, situated on a marine shelf leading to the Atlantic Ocean. The sheer drop in depth from forty feet of water to thousands draws game fish enthusiasts who don't have to travel far from shore to find deep-sea fishing adventures.

CLEARLY BEAUTIFUL

Viewing the crystalline blue waters through a kayak or paddleboard constructed of completely clear polycarbonate is the ultimate above-water experience. Guided tours with Looking Glass Watersports are the perfect way to spot sea turtles swimming beneath you and a conch shell hiding in the mangrove seagrass.



The salt pans of Bonaire create a unique pink hue alongside the brilliant white sand and cerulean sea.

Photo courtesy of Bonaire Tourism

This page and far right: Unforgettable meals on the beach in Bonaire

Photo by Elliott Howell, courtesy of Bonaire Tourism

This page right and far opposite: Relax and let the Turks & Caicos waters wash all your cares away.

Photos courtesy of Wymara Resorts & Villas